

objection to the Government purchasing the estate, but it is the business of the Government to see that they do not pay too much for it. Even if the Government finish the line as they have now commenced it, I believe it will serve people who settle on the estate should it be eventually purchased and cut up for settlement. Another thing I should like to point out, and that is that we have very large coal-deposits up above Roxburgh which will be utilised in time to come. At present the trouble in the way of developing these deposits is the excessive cost of bringing the coal down on wagons. There are other resources lying undeveloped in our district, and just now we cannot afford to have a decent outhouse built because of the excessive cost of carting timber from a distance by wagons. Thus the district is kept backward, and we are not much further ahead than the people in the centre of Africa. My main point, however, is to urge the Government to push on with the construction of the line in the direction of Roxburgh.

TIMOTHY WILKINS, Farmer, of Dunrobin, made a statement on oath.

*Witness* : All I have to say is that I know it will be a great loss to the people of the Dunrobin district if the line is taken by any other way than through Moa Flat. If the line goes through the Moa Flat it will be made a profitable line and settle hundreds of people. It will be a great disappointment to those people who have been expecting the line to go through the flat for the past six years if it is not taken that way after all. I can only confirm what has been already said by Mr. Kerse in supporting the petition which we have presented.

PATRICK JOSEPH DUNNE, of Wellington, Journalist, made a statement on oath.

*Witness* : I was for some four or five years resident at Roxburgh. I think the Roxburgh people are entitled to consideration in the matter of the railway, as they are forty miles from the railway at the present time. I know nothing of the relative value of the routes or as to the cost of construction. The idea of the Roxburgh people is to get a railway by the best route that the Government can find.

H. J. H. BLOW, Under-Secretary for Public Works, examined on oath.

*Witness* : The extension of the Heriot Railway was authorised in 1899, the Act under which it was authorised stating that it was to go in the direction of Rae's Junction to a point on the eastern boundary of Section 10, Block XII., Crookston Survey District; length, about six miles and a half. The route is therefore fixed by Act of Parliament, and the Public Works Department has no volition in the matter at all. We are bound to construct the railway where Parliament has directed it shall go. A vote on account of its construction was passed in the Appropriations of 1899, stating it was for a railway between Heriot and Eddie's. We have no authority to spend money on a line that will go anywhere else. I am not aware that the construction of the line to Eddie's was intended to settle the route to Roxburgh. I think the petitioners have come to that conclusion without very much warrant. If Parliament ever sees fit to authorise a line to Roxburgh it will probably be found that a different route altogether will be desirable in the interests of all.

73. *The Chairman.*] Why did you name your plan the "Heriot-Roxburgh Railway" then?—Because they are the plans of a survey which extended from Heriot to Roxburgh; but we are not constructing the railway according to that survey. There was an agitation for some years for a survey to be made for a line between Heriot and Roxburgh, and the Government gave ear to the agitation to the extent of authorising such a survey.

74. Which, in your opinion, is the most beneficial route of the two in question for the colony?—Well, the question raised in this petition is as to whether this railway now in process of construction should be stopped.

75. But Roxburgh is the objective?—I do not officially know that.

76. But, as far as this petition is concerned, I think it is our duty to ascertain which is the most beneficial line for the colony?—I have no objection to saying that, in my opinion, any line constructed to Roxburgh should go from Lawrence. It would be thirty-four miles shorter to Dunedin, and would cost no more money than a line by way of Eddie's or Moa Flat, and would be in quite as good a position to command the traffic as either of those lines.

77. *Mr. Bennet.*] Which of these lines would be the easiest to maintain when constructed?—I should think the Eddievale line, because there is a shorter length of rough country. It would be an easier line to maintain.

*Approximate Cost of Paper.*—Preparation, not given; printing (1,375 copies), £3 10s. 6d.

By Authority: JOHN MACKAY, Government Printer, Wellington.—1901.

Price 6d.]